

Senator Michael Bennet Testimony on H.R. 2621: *Chimney Rock National Monument Establishment Act*

House Subcommittee on National Parks, 11/3/10, 10:00am, 1334 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, I thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the Chimney Rock National Monument Establishment Act.

I've been proud to work on similar legislation in the Senate over the last two Congresses. And I've enjoyed working with Congressman Tipton on this bipartisan effort.

I also want to recognize Ricky Lightfoot – seated behind me – a distinguished archeologist who has worked extensively at Chimney Rock.

Ricky is joining us today from beautiful Mancos, CO.

I am here to testify in support of H.R. 2621, The Chimney Rock National Monument Establishment Act.

Chimney Rock is located roughly 20 miles west of Pagosa Springs – in the southwest part of Colorado.

This 4,700 acre site is located on San Juan National Forest land and is recognized as perhaps the most significant historical site managed by the entire Forest Service.

The twin spires of Chimney Rock – depicted in the photo on the screens above – attracted the ancestors of the modern Pueblo Indians to this area nearly a thousand years ago.

This unique culture had their main settlement in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, and had a settlement at what is now Mesa Verde National Park near Cortez.

The Chaco People established a remote outpost at the base of Chimney Rock called The Great House Pueblo. The Great House is situated just south of the twin spires and is now displayed on the screens above.

The House was built from six million stones, 5,000 logs and 25,000 tons of earth and clay. All of these materials were arduously hauled 1,000 feet up from the valley floor.

We think they established this outpost to observe a rare lunar event. The so-called “major lunar standstill,” occurs once every 18.6 years when the moon appears to rise in the exact same spot three nights in a row.

The Chaco People built the Great House Pueblo to observe this spectacular celestial event. There are only two other places in the world where ancient people used stone structures to mark a lunar standstill. Stonehenge is one of them.

Chimney Rock has incredible historical and cultural significance. Yet the site lacks a designation equal to that stature. This discrepancy is why countless preservation groups got involved with Chimney Rock.

This constituency, coupled with a bipartisan group of local officials, Colorado counties, municipalities and tribes have joined in an effort to give Chimney Rock the proper designation.

They came together in 2009 and asked me to carry legislation to designate Chimney Rock a National Monument in the Senate. And I've now been pleased to work with Congressman Tipton on this companion bill in the House.

This legislation will provide much-needed protection, and much-deserved recognition, for the site.

Passage of this bill will also provide increased tourism and economic development in southwest Colorado.

Put simply, a National Monument designation is warranted for Chimney Rock and that new designation will drive economic development and job creation throughout the region.

The measure was drafted with the help of the Forest Service, historical preservation organizations, Native American tribes and dozens of other local stakeholders.

I would draw the Committee's attention to a number of letters I brought with me today from several of the organizations involved in that robust stakeholder process.

Here I have letters of support from:

- A bipartisan group of Archuleta County Commissioners, who have extended their unanimous support for this bill;
- The Republican Mayor of Pagosa Springs, Colorado – the town nearest to Chimney Rock;
- The Pagosa Springs Area Chamber of Commerce; and
- The Pagosa Springs Community Development Corporation.

I'd like to submit these letters, sent to Congressman Tipton and me, into the record to illustrate the broad level of local support for this popular legislation.

My Chimney Rock bill in the Senate – nearly identical to Congressman Tipton's legislation – was reported out of the Senate Energy Committee in a bipartisan voice vote last Congress.

I'm hopeful the House Natural Resources Committee will see fit to lend similar support to Congressman Tipton's measure as we move towards enacting this popular legislation into law.

Thank you Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for allowing me the opportunity to testify today on this important topic.